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THE BURDEN OF LOVE.

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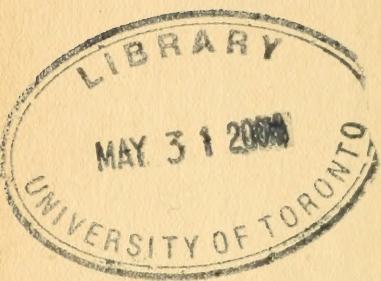
BY

ELIZABETH GIBSON

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1904



TO
C. M. E. J.

*I thought within these cloistered walls
To dwell at peace :
I see world-sights ; I hear world-calls
That never cease.*

*I dreamt that prayer and penance done
Would ease my life :
Alas ! my heart has but begun
The way of strife.*

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“Ask This for Me”

Ask this for me—

That I may sing of passion, sorrow, death,
Love, life, and toil, while God shall lend me
breath;

Then lie, peace-happed, a seed that quickeneth.

Ask this for me—

That I may ever spend my love-lit days
In sweet babe-gardens, turning toil to praise
For crystal innocence and infant ways.

Ask this for me—

That I may never housel black despair ;
That all the guests who climb my spirit-stair
Be joy-begot of sunshine and sweet air.

ASK THIS FOR ME

Ask this for me—

That I may mount from love to higher love,

Till, youth's receding longings far above,

I turn into the path where thou dost rove.

Delaying Love

DIDST thou not say, "I come! and Love may be
Born, a late blossom, on a winter tree?"

Didst thou not promise ere another morn
From out my breast thy hand might pluck the
thorn?

Didst thou not cry, "The stream may lend me
grace

To see within her depths Love's dawning face?"

Nay, saidst thou not, "The hills may fold in
peace

Two hearts, and bid their woe for ever cease?"

DELAYING LOVE

Didst thou not whisper, "Lo, the quickening
 ' Breath '

May merge thy soul in mine for life, for death ? "

Yea. And I answered, " Come ! " Why tarriest
 thou ?

Mayhap till ripe fruit glow along the bough !

Love, as Thou Wilt

BELOVED, love me ever as thou wilt :
Throne me in palaces thy dreams have built ;
Or wander thou the world, and I will dwell
Within my cell.

Beloved, love me but as clear-eyed Love
May bid thee, and thy answering heart approve ;
Such be thy measure—it will brim for me
Both earth and sea.

Beloved, love me only as I may
Receive, and lift proud bearing to the day ;
And lie calm-souled beneath the open night
In the stars' sight.

LOVE, AS THOU WILT

Beloved, if perchance our several ways
May end in paradise, the chord of praise
From my hid heart-strings would thy presence
wring
While thou wouldst sing.

Mad

O MAIDENS, would ye learn my pride and glee,
Why garlanded adown the wind I flee—
At Mary Mother's shrine to bend the knee? . .
For three long days my lover cherished me.

Nay, ask not whither fled my kingly guest.
I rear upon my happy field a nest,
Heedless if he be gone, north, south, east,
west. . . .
For three nights long I lay upon his breast.

The Bridge

I BUILT a bridge across the severing stream ;
And, though you never come,
The waters erewhile dumb
Beset the piers with happy singing-dream.

When I have fallen asleep to their sweet sound
You may pass, longing, by,
And your heart, waking, cry,
“ Could but the builder of the bridge be found ! ”

“Sleep You Have Stolen”

SLEEP you have stolen from me: therefore dream
On dream of mine sings in your slumber-stream.

Since unto you my longing heart has fled,
By it may your sad heart be comforted.

Joy you have taken: therefore my delight
Makes your sky bluer and your stars more bright.

And since to you my unreturning rest
Has gone, I bid it be your willing guest.

Peace have you taken; therefore sail at ease
Unpiloted o'er moon-enchanted seas.

“ SLEEP YOU HAVE STOLEN ”

Comfort has gone from me : so your despairs
Shall wither, and my sorrow drink your cares.

Love you have taken : therefore Love shall flow
Through every flood where you may laving go.

The Love-Possessed

MEN say: "She wears a joyful pride
Who went erewhile in sober dress."
I flee into the hawthorn glade
To hide my secret happiness.

"And beauty flashes in a face
Where beauty never shone before."
(Love, Love, take back thy gleaming grace,
Lest of my heart they find the door !)

"She's garlanded ; full sure has Love
Set on her brows a fadeless kiss."
I fling a veil about my head
Lest any seize my trembling bliss.

“Why should I Live?”

WHY should I live, if not for thee my toil,
If not for thee the harvest of my days?
Why strive to wrest from life fair hidden spoil
Who meet thee at no turning of the ways?

How can I live, if thou whose loving broke
My life in fragments come not now to heal?
How can I rise to bear life's heavy yoke
Who ever at Love's altar woe-struck kneel?

Why should I die? May not the changeful wind
That bore thee once the burden of my song,
That sped thy love to me, our hearts yet bind
In one that we forget Love's bitter wrong?

“ I Am Content ”

I AM content to tread a lonely path
If I but know the way your steps are bent,
What lands you till, and what far seas you
 plough,
I am content.

I sleep at ease, though under moonless skies
In the great hush our lives are never blent :
Your strength my peace ; mine, yours—cold
 knight, chaste maid.
I am content.

My heart is quiet, though o'er sleeping babes
In pride of fatherhood you never leant ;
The lanes are full of waking infant-smiles.
I am content.

“ I AM CONTENT ”

Though the joy-palace of an eager dream
By lightning-brand was in a moment rent,
To work and sleep beneath the open sky
I am content.

Heaven's sun compassionate draws up the flood
Of passion in my virgin body pent :
The love you needed not my fellows drink.
I am content.

“ None can deliver save calm Death,” I cried ;
Yet in a storm-year is my anguish spent ;
You—one of many knights that northward ride.
I am content.

Come, Love !

A SINGER in the evening shadows sang
O'er fell and dale ; and yet the echo rang
In chaffering mart, in dreams, 'mid battle clang.
(Come, Love !)

One bent—a reed beneath that wind of Song—
(Whence, whither blowing ?) One amid the
throng
Of rushes should the wind remember long ?
(Come, Love !)

Come, Love ! Come, Love ! ere all the sedge be
sere ;
Return, return, ere winter bind the mere ;
Sweep low among the reeds that I may hear.
(Come, Love !)

COME, LOVE!

Come, Love! I dare not lift mine eyes to thee
Hoping, despairing. Thou, my destiny.
Bend, break, or quicken all the life of me!
(Come, Love!)

Come, Love, and tarry through the changing
light,
While toil and song for old earth's use take
flight,
Ere all our life be folded into night.
(Come, Love!)

Lost

How have I lost you? Has some fateful word
A note discordant in your loving stirred?

How have I lost you? Is my life less fair
Than when God wrought it out of Eden air?

How have I lost you, quenched the sudden glow
That made you love me three long days ago?

But have I lost you? Nay, for common grief
Swells with its gathered store Love's mournful
sheaf.

Love's Passing

BECAUSE one looked upon me, nevermore
Can life be grey and hopeless as before;
New earth-scenes on my joyful vision rise,
I look at will through ever-open skies.

One spake my name: I lifted up my head
To wear the wreath of those dear words he said;
No more I drooping walk with footstep slow,
But confident among Love's crownèd go.

And for that one said: "Live!" I will not die
Before my loving lord again draws nigh.
And now no more my singing voice is dumb,
But fashions songs to sing when he shall come.

Love's Bondager

I WOULD from stones and quickens free thy soil,
The gleaming hay upon thy meadows mow,
Brim all the sun-long day with happy toil,
At seedtime sow.

I would at morning drive afield thy plough,
And with the threshers wield the heavy flail,
Gather thine apples from the laden bough.
“Thine arm would fail.”

Love, I would bind thy sheaves, thy barn to fill
With overflowing store of yellow grain;
Fetching no bitter weed nor poppy vain.
“Thou hast no skill.”

“ I Love Thee Not ”

“ I LOVE thee not,” I said, “ as time shall
prove ”—

Lest thou shouldst love for very pity of me.
And still the flaming passion of my love
To ashes burns all beauty that I see.

I have no passing joy in anything,
Who am bereft, my lord, of love and thee ;
In vain earth quickens at the touch of Spring,
In vain the throstles sing in every tree.

Day Brings Despair

ALL night I dream that you are mine,
That your dear care
Husbands my life's wide-spreading vine. . . .
Day brings despair.

.

When others lay their hands along
The organ keys,
I hearken unto pilgrim-song
On bended knees.

You build and dig for stranger-folk,
Plant many a tree.
When will you rear of faerie oak
A hut for me?

DAY BRINGS DESPAIR

You wander up and down the land—

A threshing-floor,

A barn, your bed. When will you turn

In to my door?

.

All night I dream that you are come,

That on my hair

Your head is pillowed—I, joy-dumb. . . .

Day brings despair.

At Rest

PASSION is dead ! I folded her meek hands

Upon her breast, and shut her weary eyes ;

Her singing mouth is closed with fair head-
bands.—

But Oh, tread soft, belovèd, where she lies !

Passion is dead ! Chaste maids have laid white
flowers

From fields of snow upon her quiet breast :

She hears nor wave nor bird-note through the
hours.—

But do not sing a furlong from her rest !

Mater Dei

LEAN low to hear a woman's cry,
 Queen Mary! throned in highest heaven.
Let infants in my bosom lie,
 Maiden! to whom a son was given.

I sprang to being from Love's side:
 Of Love may I be comforted,
And nourish striplings for his pride;
 Woman! whose breast a baby fed.

To earth who gave me noble powers
 I'd give her growing sons again—
Their song, strength, skill and all her dowers—
 Mother! whose son has succoured men.

MATER DEI

Thou wilt not hear, thou wilt not heed ;

The heavens are deaf to mortal cry. . . .

Nay, nay, have pity on Love's need,

Heart ! who hast seen thy dear hopes die.

Gifts

O LOVE, that at my portal knockest late,
Why comest thou to one made desolate ?

What bringest thou? Kind comfort for distress,
And herbs of healing for life's bitterness?

"I bring a scroll of pain that thou mayest know
To comfort other lovers' hapless woe.

"That kindred hearts may find a faint relief,
Smite with thy trembling hand this harp of grief.

"And wear this crown of fire, that thou mayest
light
The love-lost wandering in sorrow's night."

A Shepherdess

My sheep awake the morn

With piteous cries.

(Love, Love, thou slumberest long :

Awake, arise !)

The sheep at noonday feed :

(At noonday I

Have need of thy true voice—

To live thereby.)

The flock is safe in fold

When evening falls :

(Were I but, Love, within

Thy heart's dear walls !)

The Changeling Guest

BECAUSE I cannot see you I must sing
Till I forget the time of day and night,
As hour by hour goes by on silent wing
And days pass noiseless in unnoted flight.

Because you never come I harbour song
In fair guest-chambers, bind with flowers his
hair,
Give bread and wine that unto you belong,
And say: "It is my lord who tarries there."

But ah, belovèd, when my stair I climb
To wake and wait upon my cherished guest,
I tremble lest the fulness of the time
Be come, and thou, not song, lie there at rest.

“ Qui tollis peccata mundi ”

WHOE’ER thou art, whate’er thou art,

O Spirit who renewest men,

Bid passion from my being part ;

Give me an infant’s heart again.

The yearning for my lover’s breast,

O Lamb of God, take thou away ;

Quench thou in cool undying rest

The flame that burns me night and day.

And, born of others’ dear delight,

The babe my mateless blood would bear

May I behold—a star to light

The joyless dark of lone despair.

“If I Should Wake”

If I should wake some morn to find you here,
My cheek would flaunt no sign, my heart be
brave;

Unto mine eyes would leap no happy tear—
The seeing of you all the joy I crave.

If I should meet you where the waters spread
Their open bosom to the lordly sky,
I would not feel of whelming love adread,
Nor would my tranquil heart beg thine draw
nigh.

If you should cry: “I love!” not yea nor nay
Would my heart answer: I would wait to
prove

If you were but the mirage of a day
Or were in truth a very god of love.

“You Never Held Me”

You never held me for the space

One sees a shooting star ;

And yet begirt by your embrace

All my life's yearnings are.

You never pressed your lips to mine

To drink life's brimming cup ;

But Love himself drinks of the wine

That evermore wells up.

Nor did you in my garden take

Sweet honey from the flowers ;

Yet Love's own wings in passing make

Plants fertile in my bowers.

“Where’er you Wander”

WHERE’ER you wander, man of men, I rove
Blent with your being, mingled in your love.

Once as a man you stood in lonely pride ;
Now is a woman fashioned from your side.

You said: “ I dig a furrow : none shall aid.”
Another foot than yours has pressed the spade.

You saw as man sees: now in mute surprise
You scan the wide world with a woman’s eyes.

Strength of a man broke through your music’s
words:

Now woman’s weakness sounds among the
chords.

Life’s image that with patient care you ’grave
Leaps at my touch as Venus from the wave.

The Craftsman

WHAT art thou weaving so cheerily,

Craftsman, craftsman ?

“ A cradle of willows as high as thy knee,

Where thy foot may rock young Love in his
glee.”

Craftsman, craftsman, thank-thee.

What art thou shaping with faithful care,

Craftsman, craftsman ?

“ An oaken coffin for hope and despair ;

Have I not wrought it goodly and fair ?”

Craftsman, craftsman, thank-thee.

What art thou building so heartfully,

Craftsman, craftsman ?

“ A hostel of Singing for thy roof-tree

To shield thee from storm in the lonely to-be.”

Craftsman, craftsman, thank-thee.

Love's Pursuit

THOU fleest, and I follow ; yea, I take
Thy crumbs as food,—for Love's abounding sake.

I come : thy tent is gone—thou mountest
higher ;

I warm myself at thy nigh-quenchèd fire.

Night after night by slumber am I found
In thy dear body's dint upon the ground.

.

At length I reach thee—thine unbidden guest. . .
Love ! lift me up to honour and thy breast !

“ Forget Me ”

FORGET me, if the sounder thou wilt sleep,
The better fashion with the tools of life ;
Forget, if any vision move to weep,
If to thy heart I bring the stir of strife.

Remember not the look of stranger-lands,
The colour of a northern autumn sky ;
Nor come to wander by our stormy strands,
Lest thou hear sorrow in the sea-waves cry.

Bend south and east and west thy goings forth,
Return not to these forests of the pine,
Nor harbour any farer from the north
Lest speech and ways of his perchance be
mine.

Return !

I CANNOT live without thee: Love, return !

Does not my quick blood riot—babes to bear ?

Does no stray sunbeam light my shadowing
hair,

Nor any flame of passion in me burn ?

Did not God fashion me to solace thee ?

And is not my chaste body fenced around

So that no man may tread my garden ground

Until thy hand upon the wicket be ?

I cannot live without thee ? Night and day

I turn to thee across the severing waste.

Ah, if but yet new-wakened love should haste

To meet me, desolate, upon the way !

“Turn Thou”

TURN thou, dear lord, and see
If I be grown to thee.

In woodland shrines I pray :
“ Love, burn my dross away !”

With tireless hands and feet
I make my dwelling meet,

Lest thou, my lord, shouldst rest
But one hour as my guest.

The harp thy joy may sweep
Sacred for thee I keep.

“TURN THOU”

My fire burns warm and clear

Against thy drawing near ;

And through my casement wide

The fresh winds, panting, ride.

Each day I seize from heaven

New bliss my bread to leaven.

The wine to fill thy cup

From Paradise welled up.

If thou be spent, a bed

Is ever bracken-spread.

Lord, lord, I, straining, hear

Thy footstep drawing near !

A Rainbow

O'ER the dark chasm I saw a footway flung,
And sped to cross and reach my soul's desire—
A land of dreams where, to the sound of lyre,
The nymphs and wood-gods sang in forest
tongue.

I paused, to loose upon the hither side
The ever-growing burden of the years:
And here I still abide—the gleaming bridge
Was but a sun-ray on a mist of tears.

Forget Thee?

How should I then forget thee? Does the day
Remember naught of shadowy, restful night
That for a season puts her cares to flight?
Once in the shelter of thy love I lay.

How should I then forget thee? Does the plain,
Sun-parched, forget the blessing of the sky
That answers with full showers her silent cry?
On my sore longing fell thy love's cool rain.

How should I then forget thee? See thy wing
O'ershadows me, nor can I from thee go;
And so, Love, toward thy greatness I would
grow,
Though to thy breast mine arms may never cling.

Memory

I KNOW not where a joyous life you lead,
Where your brave manhood fills the earth with
pride:

And yet, a spirit on a shadow-steed,
From wood to new-clad wood you, singing,
ride
Through all my country-side.

I shall not see you in the days to be;
Our ways lie far apart and never meet;
So I am fain to dwell with memory,
And bid her all your tale of song repeat
Within my heart's retreat.

Night and Morn

BESIDE your bed I watch

When day has flown :

By day, the world's ; by night,

You're mine alone.

I never take your hand,

Or smooth your hair ;

And never in a dream

You see me there.

But when you open wide

Your door of morn,

You see my gleaming tears

Upon the thorn.

NIGHT AND MORN

My kisses on its buds
But half-awake,
My garment in the leaves
Young breezes shake.

Rest, Little Heart

A BAR between our yearning souls is set
That Love may not in triumph overleap.
Belovèd, in the happy fields of sleep
I find thee who must, waking, seek thee yet.

Is it the voice of Love or cruel Fate
That bids me fling the cup of joy away,
And lonely and unsacramented stray,
To crave of kindly death an open gate !

Rest, little heart. The stars their secrets keep,
And life to no man's questioning replies ;
Nor will Death heed your knocking or your
cries.

Rest, little heart, and hush your love to sleep.

“ I will not cease to sing ”

I WILL not cease to sing ;

For you may be

The distance of a wing

Alone from me.

I build with care the nest

That may enfold,

Belovèd, your warm breast,

And quick joy hold.

For Love

Am I not made as other women are

For Love, for suckling infants at my breast?

Day's labour ended, 'neath the evening star,

Have I no bosom where a man may rest?

Have I no skill to weave as women weave

Of household cares the fabric of a home,

That still in lonely sorrow thou must leave

Her unto whom thou promisedst "I come"?

Age and unfruitfulness, the narrow grave

My nearing goal, with bitterness beset.

Wilt thou not come, my lord, sweet life to save?

Ah, having loved, how should you now forget?

“He Comes”

ANOTHER said: “He comes, thy lord!” . . .

I know not if I live or die
Till from my heart the flaming sword
Be plucked by him who draweth nigh.

Another said: “He comes!” . . . I know

Day lies, night lies; the earth, the sky
Have yearlong bid me live in woe,
Mocking with lies my misery.

But if his word, my lord’s, were given,

And he who spoke were messenger,
From out my life would swift be riven
The burning, bitter days that were.

If I Should Win to Thee

THE grey days pass—an ever-weary train
Bringing no joys that I may hold in fee;
Each lays a grief upon my threshold-stone.
If I should win through sorrows unto thee!

The night is trackless, and no moon appears
To light this waste of winds at strife with sea;
Blessed by swift hopes, and rent by sudden fears,
If I should win through tempests unto thee!

But in the night I heard the voice I love—
“Live, learn, and labour, reaching thus to
me!”

I wake, to battle with my daily foes.
Thus shall I win through triumphs unto thee!

“How should I rest”

How should I rest within whose ears
 Sounds evermore a moaning sea?
How should I sleep, from tears to tears,
 When night is all aflame with thee?

.

“He comes; and for a breathing space
 Thine ears shall hearken unto song,
Thine eyes behold the godlike face
 And form that to thy dreams belong.”

.

With toil I fill the long-drawn hours
 That yet must pass ere thou draw nigh
To gather hope-begotten flowers
 That all along life's river lie.

A Watcher

OF sea-hued hopes I build a tower,
And to the battlements I climb
To gaze unwearied hour by hour
Across the severing sea of time.

For who fares hitherward in pride
Now, in seven years—small matter when—
On morning wave or evening tide—
The king of all the world of men.

A Request

GRANT me but this, O Life—
That one now dumb
Unto my resting-place
At length may come,

And weighing all things well—
(My life approved)—
Speak low among the grass:
“I could have loved!”

“ Shall I despair ? ”

SHALL I despair? Does not each new-born day
Bring some fresh varying of the mood divine?
May not thy thought some impulse swift obey,
And leap o'er all that sunders unto mine?

Yea, I will hope, though thou afar shouldst dwell
In stranger-lands, across a severing sea,
Though I be prisoned in a nun's cold cell—
So long as Life shall cherish thee and me.

A Singer

THE while I in the valley toil
One singeth on the hill;
And, when I sleep, in happy dreams
The song I follow still.

I may not look upon his face
Who pipeth in the dawn;
But him the joyous birds behold,
And by him steps a fawn.

Nor know I if he ever treads
These pastures while I rest;
Yet oft I wake to find a flower
Close-laid upon my breast.

Song Triumphant

SINCE once my singing moved you—now I sing
At night when you sit dreaming by the fire ;
You hear a bird, but never see a wing
At eve in fold, at break of day in byre.

With singing-cheer I haunt your nights and
days—

(If Love pursue, how shall a mortal flee?)—
I follow you in all your several ways,
Till you shall turn your head and look on ^{me} me.

I cry to you in sleeping and at board
That you may once again beseech me,
“Come !”

SONG TRIUMPHANT

Nay, I will bar your crossing at the ford
That you may lift me up and bear me home.

Through flood and fire, in gladness and in grief,
My calling heart will never let you rest,
Till in sheer weariness you seek relief
In folding me, joy-silent, to your breast.

In the End

I FALL, as drops of rain, into the river—

The river of death.

Bear thou, O stream, unto the Sea, the Giver,

My song, my breath.

O Sea, let all my loving comfort lovers

When life-mists rise;

And bear my singing to the cloud that hovers

O'er hushed heart-cries.

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